

UNDER MY HAT **TALES** *from the* **CAULDRON**

Edited by Jonathan Strahan

HOT
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BOOKS

The logo for Hot Key Books features a stylized key. The head of the key is a circle with radiating lines, resembling a sun or a spark. The shaft of the key is a simple vertical line, and the bit is a small circle at the bottom.



THE EDUCATION OF A WITCH

ELLEN KLAGES

I

LIZZY IS AN untidy, intelligent child. Her dark hair resists combs, framing her face like thistles. Her clothes do not stay clean or tucked in or pressed. Some days, they do not stay on. Her arms and face are nut-brown, her bare legs sturdy and grimy.

She intends to be a good girl, but shrubs and sheds and unlocked cupboards beckon. In photographs, her eyes sparkle with unspent mischief; the corner of her mouth quirks in a grin. She is energy that cannot abide fences. When she sleeps, her mother smooths a hand over her cheek, in affection and relief.

Before she met the witch, Lizzy was an only child.

The world outside her bedroom is an ordinary suburb. But the stories in the books her mother reads to her, and the ones she is learning to read herself, are full of fairies and witches and magic.

She knows they are only stories, but after the lights are out,

she lies awake, wondering about the parts that are real. She was named after a princess, Elizabeth, who became the queen of England. Her father has been there, on a plane. He says that a man's house is his castle, and when he brings her mother flowers, she smiles and proclaims, "You're a prince, Jack Breyer." Under the sink—where she is not supposed to look—many of the cans say M-A-G-I-C in big letters. She watches very carefully when her mother sprinkles the powders onto the counter, but has not seen sparkles or a wand. Not yet.

2

Lizzy sits on the grass in the backyard, in the shade of the very big tree. Her arms are all over sweaty and have made damp, soft places on the newsprint page of her coloring book. The burnt umber crayon lies on the asphalt driveway, its point melted to a puddle. It was not her favorite. That is purple, worn down to a little stub, almost too small to hold.

On the patio, a few feet away, her parents sit having drinks. The ice cubes clink like marbles against the glass. Her father has loosened his tie, rolled up the sleeves of his white go-to-the-office shirt. He opens the evening paper with a crackle.

Her mother sighs. "I wish this baby would hurry up. I don't think I can take another month in this heat. It's only the end of June."

"Can't rush Mother Nature." More crackle, more clinks. "But I *can* open the windows upstairs. There's a Rock Hudson

movie at the drive-in. Should be cool enough to sleep when we get back.”

“Oh, that would be lovely! But, what about—” She drops her voice to a whisper. “Iz-ee-lay? It’s too late to call the sitter.”

Lizzy pays more attention. She does not know what language that is, but she knows her name in most of the secret ways her parents talk.

“Put her in her jammies, throw the quilt in the back of the station wagon, and we’ll take her along.”

“I don’t know. Dr. Spock says movies can be very frightening at her age. *We* know it’s make-believe, but—”

“The first show is just a cartoon, one of those Disney things.” He looks back at the paper. “*Sleeping Beauty*.”

“Really? Well, in that case . . . She loves fairy tales.”

Jammies are for after dark, and always in the house. It is confusing, but exciting. Lizzy sits on the front seat, between her parents, her legs straight out in front of her. She can feel the warm vinyl through thin cotton. They drive down Main Street, past the Shell station—S-H-E-L-L—past the dry cleaners that gives free cardboard with her father’s shirts, past the Methodist church where she goes to nursery school.

After that, she does not know where they are. Farther than she has ever been on this street. Behind the car, the sun is setting, and even the light looks strange, glowing on the glass and bricks of buildings that have not been in her world before. They drive so far that it is country, flat fields and woods so thick they are all shadow. On either side of her, the windows are rolled down, and the air that moves across her face is soft and smells like grass and barbecue. When they stop at a light, she hears crickets and sees

a rising glimmer in the weeds beside the pavement. Lightning bugs.

At the Sky View Drive-In they turn and join a line of cars that creep toward a lighted hut. The wheels bump and clatter over the gravel with each slow rotation. The sky is a pale blue wash now, streaks of red above the dark broccoli of the trees. Beyond the hut where her father pays is a parking lot full of cars and honking and people talking louder than they do indoors.

Her father pulls into a space and turns the engine off. Lizzy wiggles over, ready to get out. Her mother puts a hand on her arm. "We're going to sit right here in the car and watch the movie." She points out the windshield to an enormous white wall. "It'll be dark in just a few minutes, and that's where they'll show the pictures."

"The sound comes out of this." Her father rolls the window halfway up and hangs a big silver box on the edge of the glass. The box squawks with a sharp, loud sound that makes Lizzy put her hands over her ears. Her father turns a knob, and the squawk turns into a man's voice that says, ". . . concession stand right now!" Then there is cartoon music.

"Look, Lizzy." Her mother points again, and where there had been a white wall a minute before is now the biggest Mickey Mouse she has ever seen. A mouse as big as a house. She giggles.

"Can you see okay?" her father asks.

Lizzy nods, then looks again and shakes her head. "Just his head, not his legs." She smiles. "I could sit on Mommy's lap."

"Fraid not, honey. No room for you until the baby comes."

It's true. Under her sleeveless plaid smock, her mother's stomach is very big and round and the innie part of her lap is

outie. Lizzy doesn't know how the baby got in there, or how it's going to come out, but she hopes that will be soon.

"I thought that might be a problem." He gets out and opens the back door. "Scoot behind the wheel for a second."

Lizzy scoots, and her father puts the little chair from her bedroom right on the seat of the car. Its white painted legs and wicker seat look very wrong there. But he holds it steady, and when she climbs up and sits down, it *feels* right. Her feet touch flat on the vinyl, and she can see *all* of Mickey Mouse.

"Better?" He gets back in and shuts his door.

"Uh-huh." She settles in, then remembers. "Thank you, Daddy."

"What a good girl." Her mother kisses her cheek. That's almost as good as a lap.

Sleeping Beauty is Lizzy's first movie. She is not sure what to expect, but it is a lot like TV, only much bigger, and in color. There is a king and queen and a princess who is going to marry the prince, even though she is just a baby. That happens in fairy tales.

Three fairies come to bring presents for the baby. Not very good ones—just beauty and songs. Lizzy is sure the baby would rather have toys. The fairies are short and fat and wear Easter colors. They have round, smiling faces and look like Mrs. Carmichael, her Sunday School teacher, except with pointy hats.

Suddenly the speaker on the window booms with thunder and roaring winds. Bright lightning makes the color pictures go black-and-white for a minute, and a magnificent figure appears in a whoosh of green flames. She is taller than everyone else, and wears shiny black robes lined with purple.

Lizzy leans forward. "Oooh!"

"Don't be scared." Her mother puts a hand on Lizzy's arm. "It's only a cartoon."

"I'm not." She stares at the screen, her mouth open. "She's *beautiful*."

"No, honey. She's the witch," her father says.

Lizzy pays no attention. She is enchanted. Witches in books are old and bent over, with ugly warts. The woman on the screen has a smooth, soothing voice, red, red lips, and sparkling eyes, just like Mommy's, with a curving slender figure, no baby inside.

She watches the story unfold, and clenches her hands in outrage for the witch, Maleficent. If the whole kingdom was invited to the party, how could they leave *her* out? That is not fair!

Some of this she says a little too out loud, and gets Shhh! from both her parents. Lizzy does not like being shh'd, and her lower lip juts forward in defense. When Maleficent disappears, with more wind and green flames, she sits back in her chair and watches to see what will happen next.

Not much. It is just the fairies, and if they want the baby princess, they have to give up magic. Lizzy does not think this is a good trade. All they do is have tea, and call each other "dear," and talk about flowers and cooking and cleaning. Lizzy's chin drops, her hands lie limp in her lap, her breathing slows.

"She's out," her father whispers. "I'll tuck her into the back."

"No," Lizzy says. It is a soft, sleepy no, but very clear. A few minutes later, she hears the music change from sugar-sweet to pay-attention-now, and she opens her eyes all the way. Maleficent is back. Her long slender fingers are a pale green, like cream of grass, tipped with bright red nails.

"Her hands are pretty, like yours, Mommy," Lizzy says. It is a nice thing to say, a compliment. She waits for her mother to pat her arm, or kiss her cheek, but hears only a soft *pfft* of surprise.

For the rest of the movie, Lizzy is wide, wide awake, bouncing in her chair. Maleficent has her own castle, her own mountain! She can turn into a dragon, purple and black, breathing green fire! She fights off the prince, who wants to hurt her. She forces him to the edge of a cliff and then she—

A tear rolls down Lizzy's cheek, then another, and a loud snuffle that lets all the tears loose.

"Oh, Lizzy-Lou. That was a little *too* scary, huh?" Her mother wipes her face with a tissue. "But there's a happy ending."

"Not happy," Lizzy says between sobs. "He *killed* her."

"No, no. Look. She's not dead. Just sleeping. Then he kisses her, and they live happily ever after."

"Noooo," Lizzy wails. "Not her. *Melficent!*"

They do not stay for Rock Hudson.

3

"Lizzy? Put your shoes back on," her mother says.

Her father looks up over *Field and Stream*. "Where are you two off to?"

"Town and Country. I'm taking Lizzy to the T-O-Y S-T-O-R-E."

"Why? Her birthday's not for months."

"I know. But everyone's going to bring presents for the baby,

and Dr. Spock says that it's important for her to have a little something, too. So she doesn't feel left out."

"I suppose." He shrugs and reaches for his pipe.

When her mother stops the car right in front of Kiddie Korner, Lizzy is so excited she can barely sit still. It is where Christmas happens. It is the most special place she knows.

"You can pick out a toy for yourself," her mother says when they are inside. "Whatever tickles your fancy."

Lizzy is not sure what part of her is a fancy, but she nods and looks around. Kiddie Korner smells like cardboard and rubber and dreams. Aisle after aisle of dolls and trucks, balls and blocks, games and guns. The first thing she sees is Play-Doh. It is fun to roll into snakes, and it tastes salty. But it is too ordinary for a fancy.

She looks at stuffed animals, at a doll named Barbie who is not a baby but a grown-up lady, at a puzzle of all the United States. Then she sees a *Sleeping Beauty* coloring book. She opens it to see what pictures it has.

"What fun! Shall we get that one?"

"Maybe."

It is too soon to pick. There is a lot more store. Lizzy puts it back on the rack and turns a corner. *Sleeping Beauty* is everywhere. A Little Golden Book, a packet of View-Master reels, a set of to-cut-out paper dolls, a lunchbox. She stops and considers each one. It is hard to choose. Beside her, she hears an impatient puff from her mother, and knows she is running out of time.

She is about to go back and get the coloring book when she sees a shelf of bright yellow boxes. Each of them says P-U-P-P-E-T in large letters.

"Puppets!" she says, and runs over to them.

"Oh, look at those! Which one shall we get? How about the princess? Isn't she pretty!"

Lizzy does not answer. She is busy looking from one box to the next, at the molded vinyl faces that peer out through celophane windows. Princess, princess, princess. Prince. King. Fairy, fairy, prince, fairy, princess—and then, at the end of the row, she sees the one that she has not quite known she was looking for. Maleficent!

The green face smiles down at her like a long-lost friend.

"That one!" Lizzy is not tall enough to grab the box; she points as hard as she can, stretching her arm so much it pulls her shoulder.

Her mother's hand reaches out, then stops in mid-air. "Oh." She frowns. "Are you sure? Look, here's Flora, and Fauna and—" She pauses. "Who's the other one?"

"Merryweather," Lizzy says. "But I want *her*!" She points again to Maleficent.

"Hmm. Tell you what. I'll get you all *three* fairies."

That is tempting. But Lizzy knows what she wants now, and she knows how to get it. She does not yell or throw a tantrum. She shakes her head slowly and makes her eyes very sad, then looks up at her mother and says, in a quiet voice, "No thank you, Mommy."

After a moment, her mother sighs. "Oh, *all* right," she says, and reaches for the witch.

Lizzy opens the box as soon as they get in the car. The soft vinyl head of the puppet is perfect—smiling red lips, yellow eyes, curving black horns. Just as she remembers. Beneath the pale

green chin is a red ribbon, tied in a bow. She cannot see anything more, because there is cardboard.

It takes her a minute to tug that out, and then the witch is free. Lizzy stares. She expected flowing purple and black robes, but Maleficent's cotton body is a red plaid mitten with a place for a thumb on both sides.

Maybe the black robes are just for dress-up. Maybe this is her bathrobe. Lizzy thinks for a few minutes, then decides that is true. Plaid is what Maleficent wears when she's at home, in her castle, reading the paper and having coffee. It is more comfortable than her work clothes.

4

On Saturday, Lizzy and her mother go to Granny Atkinson's house on the other side of town. The women talk about baby clothes and doctor things, and Lizzy sits on the couch and plays with her sneaker laces. Granny gets out a big brown book, and shows her a picture of a fat baby in a snowsuit. Mommy says *she* was that baby, a long time ago, but Lizzy does not think that could be true. Granny laughs and after lunch teaches Lizzy to play gin rummy and lets her have *two* root beers because it is so hot.

When they pull into their own driveway, late in the afternoon, Lizzy's mother says, "There's a big surprise upstairs!" Her eyes twinkle, like she can hardly wait.

Lizzy can't wait, either. She runs in the front door and up to her room, which has yellow walls and a window that looks out

onto the driveway so she can see when Daddy comes home. She has slept there her whole life. When she got up that morning, she made most of her bed and put Maleficent on the pillow to guard while she was at Granny's.

When she reaches the doorway, Lizzy stops and stares. Maleficent is gone. Her *bed* is gone. Her dresser with Bo Peep and her bookcase and her toy chest and her chair. All gone.

"Surprise!" her father says. He is standing in front of another room, across the hall, where people sleep when they are guests. "Come and see."

Lizzy comes and sees blue walls and brown heavy curtains. Her bed is next to a big dark wood dresser with a mirror too high for her to look into. Bo Peep is dwarfed beside it, and looks as lost as her sheep. The toy chest is under a window, Maleficent folded on top.

"Well, what do you think?" Her father mops his face with a bandana and tucks it between his blue jeans and his white t-shirt.

"I *liked* my room," Lizzy says.

"That's where the baby's going to sleep, now." Her mother gives her a one-arm hug around the shoulders. "*You* get a big-girl room." She looks around. "We will have to get new curtains. You can help me pick them out. Won't that be fun?"

"Not really." Lizzy stands very still in the room that is not her room. Nothing is hers anymore.

"Well, I'll let you get settled in," her father says in his glad-to-meet-you voice, "and get the grill started." He ruffles his hand on Lizzy's hair. "Hot dogs tonight, just for you."

Lizzy tries to smile, because they are her favorite food, but only part of her mouth goes along.

At bedtime, her mother hears her prayers and tucks her in and sings the good-night song in her sweet, soft voice. For that few minutes, everything is fine. Everything is just the way it used to be. But the moment the light is off and the door is closed—not all the way—that changes. All the shadows are wrong. A street-light is outside one window now, and the very big tree outside the other, and they make strange shapes on the walls and the floor.

Lizzy clutches Maleficent under the covers. The witch will protect her from what the shapes might become.

5

“When do you get the baby?” Lizzy asks. They are in the yellow bedroom, Lizzy’s real room. Her mother is folding diapers on the new changing table.

“Two weeks, give or take. I’ll be gone for a couple of days, because babies are born in a hospital.”

“I’ll go with you!”

“I’d like that. But this hospital is only for grown-ups. You get to stay here with Teck.”

Teck is Lizzy’s babysitter. She has a last name so long no one can say it. Lizzy likes her. She has white hair and a soft, wrinkled face and makes the *best* grilled cheese sandwiches. And she is the only person who will play Candy Land more than once.

But when the baby starts to come, it is ten days too soon. Teck is away visiting her sister Ethel. Lizzy’s father pulls into the

driveway at two in the afternoon with Mrs. Sloupe, who watches Timmy Lawton when his parents go out. There is nothing soft about her. She has gray hair in tight little curls, and her lipstick mouth is bigger than her real one.

"I'll take your suitcase upstairs," he tells her. "You can sleep in our room tonight."

Her mother sits in a chair in the living room. Her eyes are closed, and she is breathing funny. Lizzy stands next to her and pats her hand. "There there, Mommy."

"Thank you, sweetie," she whispers.

Daddy picks her up and gives her a hug, tight and scratchy. "When you wake up in the morning, you're going to be a big sister," he says. "So I need you to behave for Mrs. Sloupe."

"I'll be very have," Lizzy says. The words tremble.

He puts her down and Mommy kisses the top of her head. Then they are gone.

Mrs. Sloupe does not want to play a game. It is time for her stories on TV. They can play after dinner. Dinner is something called chicken ala king, which is yellow and has peas in it. Lizzy only eats two bites because it is icky, and her stomach is scared.

Lizzy wins Candy Land. Mrs. Sloupe will not play again. It is bedtime. But she does not know how bedtime works. She says the now-I-lay-me prayer with the wrong words, and tucks the covers too tight.

"Playing fairy tales, were you?" she says, reaching for Maleficent. "I'll put this ugly witch in the toy chest, where you can't see it. Don't want you having bad dreams."

"No!" Lizzy holds on to the puppet with both arms.

"Well, aren't you a queer little girl?" Mrs. Sloupe says. "Suit

yourself.” She turns off the light and closes the door, all the way, which makes the shadows even more wrong. When Lizzy finally falls asleep, the witch’s cloth body is damp and sticky with tears.

Her father comes home the next morning, unshaven and bleary. He picks Lizzy up and hugs her. “You have a baby sister,” he says. “Rosemary, after your mother’s aunt.” Then he puts her down and pats her behind, shooing her into the living room to watch *Captain Kangaroo*.

Lizzy pauses just beyond the hall closet, and before he shuts the kitchen door, she hears him tell Mrs. Sloupe, “She was breech. Touch and go for a while, but they’re both resting quietly, so I think we’re out of the woods.”

He takes Mrs. Sloupe home after dinner, and picks her up the next morning. It is three days before Teck arrives to be the real babysitter, and she is there every day for a week before he brings Mommy and the baby home.

“There’s my big girl,” her mother says. She is sitting up in bed. Her face looks pale and thinner than Lizzy remembers, and there are dark places under her eyes. The baby is wrapped in a pink blanket beside her. All Lizzy can see is a little face that looks like an old lady.

“Can we go to the playground today?”

“No, sweetie. Mommy needs to rest.”

“Tomorrow?”

“Maybe next week. We’ll see.” She kisses Lizzy’s cheek. “I think there’s a new box of crayons on the kitchen table. Why don’t you go look? I’ll be down for dinner.”

Dinner is a sack of hamburgers from the Eastmoor Drive-In. At bedtime, Mommy comes in and does all the right things. She

sings *two* songs, and Lizzy falls asleep smiling. But she has a bad dream, and when she goes to crawl into bed with Mommy and Daddy, to make it all better, there is no room. The baby is asleep between them.

For days, the house is full of grown-ups. Ladies and aunts come in twos and threes and bring casseroles and only say hi to Lizzy. They want to see the baby. They all make goo-goo sounds and say, "What a little darling!" At night, some men come, too. They look at the baby, but just for a minute, and do not coo. They go out onto the porch and have beers and smoke.

The rest of the summer, all any grown-up wants to do is hold the baby or feed the baby or change the baby. Lizzy doesn't know why; it is *very* stinky. She tries to be more interesting, but no one notices. The baby cannot do a somersault, or say the Pledge of Allegiance or sing "Fairy Jocka Dormy Voo." All she can do is lie there and spit up and cry.

And sleep. The baby sleeps all the time, and every morning and every afternoon, Mommy naps with her. The princess is sleeping, so the whole house has to stay quiet. Lizzy cannot play her records, because it will wake the baby. She can't jump on her bed. She can't even build a tall tower with blocks because if it crashes, it will wake the baby. But when the baby screams, which is a lot, no one even says Shhh!

Lizzy thinks they should give the baby back.

"Will you read to me?" she asks her mother, when nothing else is happening.

"Oh . . . not now, Lizzy-Lou. I've got to sterilize some bottles for Rosie. How 'bout you be a big girl, and read by yourself for a while?"

Lizzy is tired of being a big girl. She goes to her room but does not slam the door, even though she wants to, because she is also tired of being yelled at. She picks up Maleficent. The puppet comes to life around her hand. Maleficent tells Lizzy that she is very smart, very clever, and Lizzy smiles. It is good to hear.

Lizzy puts on her own bathrobe, so they match. "Will you read to me?" she asks. "Up here in our castle?"

Maleficent nods, and says in a smooth voice, "Of course I will. That would be lovely," and reads to her all afternoon. Even though she can change into anything she wants—a dragon, a ball of green fire—her eyes are always kind, and every time Lizzy comes into the room, she is smiling.

On nights when Mommy is too tired, and Daddy puts Lizzy to bed, the witch sings the good-night song in a sweet, soft voice. She knows all the words. She whispers "Good night, Lizzy-Tizzy-Toot," the special, only-at-bedtime, good-dreams name.

Maleficent loves Lizzy best.

6

Lizzy is glad when it is fall and time for nursery school, where they do not allow babies. Every morning Mrs. Breyer and Mrs. Huntington and Mrs. Lawton take turns driving to Wooton Methodist Church. When her mother drives, Lizzy gets to sit in the front seat. Other days she has to share the back with Tripper or Timmy.

She has known Timmy her whole life. The Lawtons live two

doors down. They have a new baby, too, another boy. When they had cocktails to celebrate, Lizzy heard her father joke to Mr. Lawton: “Well, Bob, the future’s settled. My two girls will marry your two boys, and we’ll unite our kingdoms.” Lizzy does not think that is funny.

Timmy is no one’s handsome prince. He is a gangly, insubstantial boy who likes to wear sailor suits. His eyes always look as though he’d just finished crying because he is allergic to almost everything, and is prone to nosebleeds. He is not a good pick for Red Rover.

The church is a large stone building with a parking lot and a playground with a fence around it. Nursery school is in a wide, sunny room on the second floor. Lizzy climbs the steps as fast as she can, hangs up her coat on the hook under L-I-Z-Z-Y, and tries to be the first to sit down on the big rug in the middle of the room, near Mrs. Dickens. There are two teachers, but Mrs. Dickens is her favorite. She wears her brown hair in braids wrapped all the way around her head and smells like lemons.

Lizzy knows all the color words and how to count up to twenty. She can write her whole name—without making the Z’s backward—so she is impatient when the other kids do not listen to her. Sometimes she has to yell at them so she can have the right color of paint. The second week of school, she has to knock Timmy down to get the red ball at recess.

Mrs. Dickens sends a note home, and the next morning, the next-door neighbor comes over to watch the baby so Lizzy’s mother can drive her to school, even though it is not her turn.

“Good morning, Lizzy,” Mrs. Dickens says at the door. “Will

you get the music basket ready? I want to talk to your mother for a minute.”

Lizzy nods. She likes to be in charge. But she also wants to know what they are saying, so she puts the tambourine and the maracas in the basket very quietly, and listens.

“How are things at home?” Mrs. Dickens asks.

“A little hectic, with the new baby. Why?”

“New baby. Of course.” Mrs. Dickens looks over at Lizzy and puts a finger to her lips. “Let’s continue this out in the hall,” she says, and that’s all Lizzy gets to hear.

But when they make Circle, Mrs. Dickens pats the right side of her chair, and says, “Come sit by me, Lizzy.” They sing the good-morning song and have Share and march to a record and Lizzy gets to play the cymbals. When it is time for Recess, Mrs. Dickens rings the bell on her desk, and they all put on their coats and hold hands with their buddies and walk down the stairs like ladies and gentlemen. For the first time, Mrs. Dickens is Lizzy’s buddy, and no one gets knocked down.

On a late October morning, Lizzy’s mother dresses her in the green wool coat, because it is cold outside. It might snow. She runs up the stairs, but the coat is stiff and has a lot of buttons, and by the time she hangs it up, Anna von Stade is sitting in *her* place in the circle. Lizzy has to sit on the other side of Mrs. Dickens, and is not happy. Timmy sits down beside her, which does not help at all.

“Children! Children! Quiet now. Friday is a holiday. Who knows what it is?”

Lizzy’s hand shoots straight up. Mrs. Dickens calls on Kevin.

“It’s Halloween,” he says.

"Very good. And we're going to have our *own* Halloween party."

"I'm going to be Pinocchio!" David says.

"We raise our hand before speaking, David." Mrs. Dickens waggles her finger at him, then waits for silence before she continues. "That will be a good costume for trick-or-treating. But for *our* party, I want each of you to come dressed as who you want to be when you grow up."

"I'm going to be a fireman!"

"I'm going to be a bus driver!"

"I'm going—"

Mrs. Dickens claps her hands twice. "Children! We do not talk out of turn, and we do not talk when others are talking."

The room slowly grows quiet.

"But it is good to see that you're all *so* enthusiastic. Let's go around the circle, and everyone can have a chance to share." She looks down to her right. "Anna, you can start."

"I'm going to be a ballerina," Anna says.

Lizzy does not know the answer, and she does not like that. Besides, she is going to be last, and all the right ones will be gone. She crosses her arms and scowls down at the hem of her plaid skirt.

"I'm going to be a doctor," Herbie says.

Fireman. Doctor. Policeman. Teacher. Mailman. Nurse. Baseball player. Mommy. Lizzy thinks about the lady jobs. Nurses wear silly hats and have to be clean all the time, and she is not good at that. Teacher is better, but two people have already said it. She wonders what else there is.

Tripper takes a long time. Finally he says, "I guess I'll be in sales."

"Like your father? That's nice." Mrs. Dickens nods. "Carol?" Carol will be a mommy. Bobby will be a fireman.

Timmy takes the longest time of all. Everyone waits and fidgets. Finally he says he wants to drive a steam shovel like Mike Mulligan. "That's fine, Timmy," says Mrs. Dickens.

And then it is her turn.

"What are *you* going to be when you grow up, Lizzy?"

"Can I see the menu, please?" Lizzy says. That is what her father says at the Top Diner when he wants a list of answers.

Mrs. Dickens smiles. "There isn't one. You can be anything you want."

"Anything?"

"That's right. You heard Andrew. He wants to be president someday, and in the United States of America, he can be."

Lizzy doesn't want to be president. Eisenhower is bald and old. Besides, that is a daddy job, like doctor and fireman. What do ladies do besides mommy and nurse and teacher? She thinks very hard, scrunching up her mouth—and then she knows!

"I'm going to be a witch," she says.

She is very proud, because no one has said that yet, no one in the whole circle. She looks up at Mrs. Dickens, waiting to hear, "Very good. Very creative, Lizzy," like she usually does.

Mrs. Dickens does not say that. She shakes her head. "We are not using our imaginations today. We are talking about real-life jobs."

"I'm going to be a witch."

"There is no such thing." Mrs. Dickens is frowning at Lizzy now, her face as wrinkled as her braids.

"Yes there is!" Lizzy says, louder. "In 'Hansel and Gretel,' and 'Snow White,' and 'Sleeping—'"

"Elizabeth? You know better than that. Those are only stories."

"Then stupid Timmy can't drive a steam shovel because Mike Mulligan is only a story!" Lizzy shouts.

"That's *enough!*" Mrs. Dickens leans over and picks Lizzy up under the arms. She is carried over to the chair that faces the corner and plopped down. "You will sit here until you are ready to say you're sorry."

Lizzy stares at the wall. She is sorry she is sitting in the dunce chair, and she is sorry that her arms hurt where Mrs. Dickens grabbed her. But she says nothing.

Mrs. Dickens waits for a minute, then makes a *tsk* noise and goes back to the circle. For almost an hour, Lizzy hears nursery school happening behind her: blocks clatter, cupboards open, Mrs. Dickens gives directions, children giggle and whisper. This chair does not feel right at all, and Lizzy squirms. After a while she closes her eyes and talks to Maleficent without making any sound. Out of long repetition, her thumb and lips move in concert, and the witch responds.

Lizzy is asking when she will learn to cast a spell, how that is different from spelling ordinary W-O-R-D-S, when the Recess bell rings behind her. She makes a disappearing puff with her fingers and opens her eyes. In a moment, she feels Mrs. Dickens's hand on her shoulder.

"Have you thought about what you said?" Mrs. Dickens asks.

"Yes," says Lizzy, because it is true.

“Good. Now, tell Timmy you’re sorry, and you may get your coat and go outside.”

She turns in the chair and sees Timmy standing behind Mrs. Dickens. His hands are on his hips, and he is grinning like he has won a prize.

Lizzy does not like that. She is not sorry.

She is *mad*.

Mad at Mommy, mad at the baby, mad at all the unfair things. Mad at Timmy Lawton, who is right here.

Lizzy clenches her fists and feels a tingling, all over, like goosebumps, only deeper. She glares at Timmy, so hard that she can feel her forehead tighten, and the anger grows until it surges through her like a ball of green fire.

A thin trickle of blood oozes from Timmy Lawton’s nose. Lizzy stares harder and watches blood pour across his pale lips and begin to drip onto his sailor shirt, red dots appearing and spreading across the white stripes.

“Help?” Timmy says.

Mrs. Dickens turns around. “Oh, dear. Not again.” She sighs and calls to the other teacher. “Linda? Can you get Timmy a washcloth?”

Lizzy laughs out loud.

In an instant, Lizzy and the chair are off the ground. Mrs. Dickens has grabbed it by the rungs and carries it across the room and out the classroom door. Lizzy is too startled to do anything but hold on. Mrs. Dickens marches down the hall, her shoes like drumbeats.

She deposits Lizzy with a thump in the corner of an empty

Sunday school room, shades drawn, dim and chilly with brown-flecked linoleum and no rug.

"You. Sit. There," Mrs. Dickens says in a voice Lizzy has not heard her use before.

The door shuts and footsteps echo away. Then she is alone and everything is very quiet. The room smells like chalk and furniture polish. She lets go of the chair and looks around. On one side is a blackboard, on the other a picture of Jesus with a hat made of thorns, like the ones Maleficent put around Sleeping Beauty's castle.

Lizzy nods. She kicks her feet against the rungs of the small chair, bouncing the rubber heels of her saddle shoes against the wood. She hears the other children clatter in from Recess. Her stomach gurgles. She will not get Snack.

But she is not sorry.

It is a long time before she hears cars pull into the parking lot, doors slamming and the sounds of many grown-up shoes on the wide stone stairs.

She tilts her head toward the door, listens.

". . . Rosemary? Isn't she adorable!" That is Mrs. Dickens.

And then, a minute later, her mother, louder. "Oh, dear, *now* what?"

Another minute, and she hears the click-clack of her mother's shoes in the hall, coming closer.

Lizzy turns in the chair, forehead taut with concentration. The tingle begins, the green fire rises inside her. She smiles, staring at the doorway, and waits.